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AUTHOR Steinbach, Trevor T.
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ABSTRACT

Characteristics of the gifted and ideas for working effectively with gifted students are presented in this guide for teachers. A list of behavioral traits exhibited by gifted students precedes a discussion of the myth that gifted individuals can be expected to perform perfectly in all areas of endeavor. Included in a discussion of learning characteristics are ways teachers can plan the learning environment and develop good student-teacher relationships. Seven suggestions for adapting instruction for the gifted child are listed. A student interest survey is included which will help the teacher plan for individual student needs. The survey, in the form of a checklist for the student, lists activities in the categories of writing, reading, science, studying, dramatics, music, mathematics, art, hobbies, and sports. (JH)

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GIFTED IDEAS

A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR TEACHERS WITH GIFTED STUDENTS

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5 of a series

Written by
Trevor T. Steinbach

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Illinois Council for the Gifted
Trevor T. Steinbach, President
556 Carlyle
Bolingbrook, Illinois 60439
(312) 759-7182

GIFTED IDEAS

A Resource Guide for Teachers

with Gifted Students

WHO IS THE GIFTED CHILD? The gifted child is found in all segments of society. These children show exceptional ability or potential in many areas and require a differentiated eductional program.

The gifted child often demonstrates outstanding intellectual ability and specific academic aptitude.

Many children demonstrate creative potential while others show superior talent or ability in many specialized areas, such as art and music.

Gifted children provide many clues to their own high ability. Parents and teachers should be aware of these clues.

Remember that the gifted child needs freedom to play, explore, and daydream as all children do.

Care must be taken neither to overestimate nor underestimate the ability or potential of any child, including the disabled or culturally different.

The following is a list of behavioral traits of gifted students. No one gifted student will display all of the traits, but many of these will appear in the average gifted student.

CURIOUS: keen observer; alert, inquisitive nature; questions the how and why of things; eager; pursues many interests in depth.

RAPID LEARNER: quickly masters facts; retains and applies information; needs minimal instruction on routine tasks.

SUSTAINS INVOLVEMENT: demonstrates persistent goal-directed behavior; has long attention span; ignores distrations; not easily discouraged by setbacks; self-motivated.

SOCIALLY AWARE: sensitive and intuitive; empathizes with others; flexible and open in manner; concerned with values and ideals.

ENJOYS READING: reads a wide range of materials for information and pleasure, including advanced selection; uses reference works offectively at an early age.

VERBAL PROFICIENCY: possesses an advanced vocabulary; expresses his or herself fluently; communicates precisely and accurately; expresses his or her own opinions freely; shows humor; asks probing questions.

RESPONSIBLE: works independently; needs minimal directions; understands and accepts guidelines; organizes tasks, peers, and events; often serves as a leader; respected by peers.

CRITICAL THINKING: analyzes and is logical; reasons out complicated things; evaluates situations; uses common sense; expresses and accepts constructive criticism.

CREATIVE: imaginative, versatile, and adaptable; flexible in ideas and actions; possesses problem-solving ability; original and inventive; gives clever and witty responses.

GENERALIZES: perceives and abstracts ideas; see relationships; grasps underlying principles; makes valid assumptions about people, events, and things; integrates areas of knowledge.

SPECIAL ABILITY: possesses unusual interest and aptitude in an academic area; has exceptional mechanical ability; demonstrates talent or potential in one of the performing arts; sensitive to aesthetic quality and to the intrinsic beauty of things.

RESOURCEFUL: a producer who has a knack for using the limited resources, time, and people in a learning environment to achieve outstanding results; a prolific and creative author; his or her study and research results in original projects; generates new ideas and viewpoints; proposes novel solutions to peer conflicts.

A Gifted Myth

One of the false assumptions many classroom teachers have is that the identified gifted student should be able to do everything perfectly. In fact, many gifted students are only excellent in specific subject areas. A student who is gifted in Language Arts may be horrible in Math. Giftedness does not mean that the child is a genius. Geniuses are gifted, but not all gifted children are geniuses. Within the concept of giftedness there are ranges. The student with a 120 I.Q. will have different abilities and interests than the student with an I.Q. of 160. These differences must be taken into account by you, the classroom teacher. As the students in regular classrooms fit into a wide variety of ranges, so do the gifted students in your building vary from mildly gifted to the profoundly gifted. Treating each child as an individual (whether they are gifted or not) enables you, the classroom teacher, to meet his or her needs. We can no more stereotype the gifted student than any other type of student.

The Learning Process for the Gifted Student

Gifted students learn in a manner different from regular students. Their ability to grasp materials and make intellectual connections enables them to learn faster and more easily than the normal student. They also specialize their interests, so that you as a teacher will have your intellectual ability taxed. Gifted students are notorious for trying to test a teacher's abilities on different subjects. They have far more

time to become an expert on a subject, and will challenge you if you are incorrect on a subject. The best strategy in working with a gifted student is to admit that you don't know everything, but that you are willing to learn along with the student. In effect, you facilitate the student's learning as a resource for the student's ideas, rather than a source of information in the traditional teaching sense.

In diagnosing and planning for a child's needs, consideration must be given to the whole child and his/her intellectual, emotional, and physical development. In preparing the learning environment, care must be taken to provide the opportunity to interact with peers as well as explore, perform, question, manipulate, and discuss.

How is the gifted child's growth best served? Emphasis is placed on a child-oriented approach which considers the individual as the basis for organization. A child must be able to progress at his/her own rate and pattern.

The teacher of a gifted child needs to accept this child as the child is and understand that behavior ranges from a startling maturity and grasp of concepts to the more typical immaturity and egocentrism. Therefore, one should not be surprised when, for example, a child who shows keen insight into complicated social problems pushes or hits another child for breaking his purple crayon.

Children tend to develop unevenly, and gifted children are usually no exception to this rule. This factor is important to keep in mind when assessing children's social and developmental needs as well as their academic skills. Certain children may excel in reading or math, but may be upset because they are unable to tie their sneakers for gym or skip a rope.

Developing a positive self-image is important for gifted children, who require support and guidance from their teacher. These children often set high standards for

themselves and become frustrated and upset when they do not readily achieve them.

As you plan the learning environment, pay attention to the physical set-up as well as to the materials and resouces. Activities that foster learning independence and creativity should encourage freedom in the use of materials and resources. For gifted children, there should be an abundance of activities that promote learning through the senses.

Remember to be attentive and respectful of children's thoughts and ideas. Do not talk down to them; use adult vocabulary. Gifted students expect it. Encourage the development of precise listening skills and the ability to follow complicated oral directions.

Many gifted children already know how to read when they enter school, and great care must be taken to provide a good reading program to meet their special needs. The teacher should be aware that gifted children cannot spend most of their reading time alone, even with interesting books and lessons. It is not reading materials on an appropriate level that make a reading program suitable for a particular gifted child. Rather, it is personal attention, frequent interaction, and nurturing support from the teacher that provide a reading program of quality.

As with many other children, gifted children often express their thoughts verbally and tend to think out loud. Challenging reading materials often pose stimulating problems and unleash a barrage of questions to answer, concepts to discuss, ideas to share, and values to clarify. The teacher cannot assume that the children understand advanced reading materials. Artful discussion and questioning reveals the child's grasp of vocabulary and allows the teacher to clarify or extend meanings.

A sensitive teacher can assist gifted children in developing social skills by providing many opportunities

to interact with peers. Gifted children may have adjustment problems, such as shyness and a tendency to be bossy or too talkative, and they need warm encouragement in developing positive social behavior and attitudes. The teaching/learning environment should promote children's acceptance of themselves and others. Gifted children are often socially aware and readily perceive differences in others.

Gifted children are usually sensitive and readily discern what is appropriate behavior. They must learn to interact with peers, share, deal with aggression, give and receive affection, accept the differences of others, and learn to cope with group demands. Gifted children want and need opportunities to discuss rules and problems and not simply conform to the do's and don'ts of the classroom. They should develop and clarify their own values and understandings.

Gifted education, while child centered, does not negate the importance of learning facts and mastering fundamental processes. The children may explore fundamental concepts from science and other areas in a manner in which basic understandings can be acquired through concrete experiences. They can use their senses as they observe and clarify and make generalizations in the process of concept formation. Their intellectual curiosity is stimulated, and they are eager to determine the how's and why's of many things in the environment. Provide the children with opportunities to associate ideas, test hypotheses, and work on cause-and-effect relationships. As a result, they are able to learn how to interpret data and reach logical conclusions.

Gifted children often finish routine tasks and appear at their teacher's desk with the plea "What can I do next?" Their boundless energy and enthusiasm for learning require experiences which actively engage them in creative problem-solving activities with a minimum of adult supervision.

Since the teacher wishes to furnish extended activities to acquire information and understanding, adding horizontal enrichment (more activities on the same level of difficulty) merely to fill in the school day is not a defensible procedure. If gifted children are going to be challenged, the teacher should provide more valuable activities which allow them to develop concepts and higher-level thought processes--thought igniters, not more drill level work.

Remember, also, that gifted children often become so involved in a particular task that they are reluctant to stop in order to participate in a group activity such as gym or music. A gentle reminder about an event prior to the scheduled time makes the adjustment easier.

Parents are an important part of gifted education. Try to involve parents in a conference session early in the school year. Assess their child's needs and explore program goals and plans with them. During a child's primary years, parents often need support in realizing that their role and relationship with their child is changing in new, exciting, and wonderful ways. Their child is taking his/her first steps on the road to learning as a unique and independent scholar.

Support parental efforts which encourage the growth of the child toward independence and simultaneously maintain family bonds of security, love and guidance.

Share information about class events and the child's progress. This enables parents to extend classroom activities. This open approach should do much to relieve the anxiety of those parents who may otherwise tend to become too directly involved in their child's learning experiences. Tact and skillful diplomacy are sometimes required of a teacher in order to help parents avoid becoming overly concerned and to encourage a healthy interest in and support for their child's endeavors.

Stress the importance of balancing creative endeavors and the development of the intellect with time for

friends, relaxation, and physical activity--just for the fun of it.

How Can the Classroom Teacher Adapt Instruction for the Gifted Child?

1. According to his/her developmental level, involve the child in planning, working at, and evaluating tasks.

2. Encourage personal growth and self-realization through the development of positive values and attitudes.

3. Use teaching/learning strategies which emphasize higher-level thinking abilities.

4. Provide tasks that include open-ended learning activities, small group work, and discussion.

5. Develop learning-process skills that enhance problem-finding and solving abilities through independent projects.

6. Maintain a learning environment that provides opportunity, materials, and a climate suitable for developing creativity.

7. Utilize materials, media, and resources in order to stimulate in-depth learning.

Remember, a gifted child needs qualitatively different learning experiences, not more of the same.

Developing Activities for Gifted
Children in the Classroom

The following is an example of a student interest survey used by many teachers with gifted students in their classroom. The survey enables the teacher to discover student interests for further investigation by the teacher and the student. It enables the teacher to use the information in preparing resources for the student's investigation of a topic.

STUDENT INTEREST SURVEY

Name_____

Grade_____Date_____

What types of activities do you prefer? Please check the activities that interest you the most.

WRITING:
_____short stories
_____newspaper articles
_____special class reports
_____cartoons, riddles
_____crossword puzzles, anagrams, word games
_____poetry
_____plays, skits
_____diary or journal
_____other (please describe)_____

READING:
_____newspapers
_____magazines
_____reference books, atlases
_____textbooks
_____comics
_____books (circle favorite kinds: biography, science, history, adventure, sports, hobbies, religion, science fiction, fairy tales, geography, fiction, other kinds_____)

SCIENCE:

_____working on a nature trail
_____doing experiments
_____working with animals
_____making things (circle favorite things: thermometer, compass, astrolabe, battery, solar heating unit, greenhouse, telescope, chick hatchery, ant farm, computer)

STUDYING:

_____chemistry
_____astronomy
_____nature, ecology
_____marine science
_____geology
_____other (please describe)_____

DRAMATICS:

_____acting in a play
_____directing a play
_____puppetry
_____pantomime
_____taking a course in filmmaking
_____acting in a radio broadcast
_____working on sets or a stage
_____other (please describe)_____

MUSIC:

_____learning about classical or folk music
_____making your own instrument
_____writing lyrics for songs
_____taking vocal lessons
_____learning to play an instrument
_____listening to music on the radio
_____attending (circle favorite: a classical concert, a rock festival, an opera, a jazz concert, a piano recital, a ballet performance)
_____singing in a chorus
_____composing music
_____taping and recording music
_____other (please describe)_____

MATH:

_____making graphs (to measure team progress)
_____making up your own number system
_____learning about the stock market
_____solving difficult problems
_____working on problems with a calculator or a computer
_____puzzles, mazes, games of logic
_____other (please describe)_____

ART:

_____painting a mural on the school wall
_____learning to use watercolors
_____visiting a sculptor's studio
_____drawing cartoons
_____learning to weave
_____experimenting with "junk" art
_____visiting an art museum
_____modeling things out of clay
_____taking a mini-course on art history
_____other (please describe)_____

HOBBIES:

_____playing chess
_____photography
_____building models
_____playing with model trains
_____bird watching
_____cooking
_____hiking
_____owning a pet
_____other (please describe)_____
_____collections (circle your interest: baseball cards, stamps, coins, old bottles, dolls, rocks, postcards, other_____)

SPORTS:

_____ball games (circle your interests: football, baseball, tennis, basketball, soccer, other_____)
_____swimming
_____skating: ice, roller
_____running

_____horseback riding
_____archery
_____hockey
_____other (please describe)_____
_____I'd like to be a spectator at_____
_____

THINGS I'D LIKE:
Occupation you would like to learn more about:

_____

Field trip you would like to take:

_____

Subject you would like to learn more about:

_____

What do you like to do best when you are alone?:

_____

What do you like to do best when you are with friends?:

_____

* * * * * * * *

Teaching gifted students is one of the greatest joys and greatest challenges for a teacher. We hope this pamphlet will enable you to assist your gifted students to reach their fullest potential.